

Opening Statement
The Honorable Frank D. Lucas, Chairman
Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Research and Rural Development

Hearing to review biotechnology in agriculture

Wednesday, June 23rd, 2004
10:00 a.m.
1300 Longworth House Office Building

Welcome to today's hearing regarding biotechnology. It has been nearly a year since we last held a hearing on this subject. That hearing focused on the regulatory aspects confronting biotechnology. One thing is for certain when it comes to biotechnology; there will always be discussion regarding the most appropriate and effective form of regulation.

Today, I would like to focus on something other than the regulatory aspect. I have asked our witnesses to describe quantitatively how products of biotechnology are used in agriculture. Even as this Subcommittee has been tracking the growth of biotechnology the last few years, we have sometimes forgotten how important this new technology has become to the rank and file producer in terms of input costs and production techniques. We are always looking for the next great innovation created from biotechnology, but the sheer amount of acceptance judged by acres planted to biotechnology products is amazing. And while the U.S. accounts for the majority of the

total percentage of plantings of biotechnology products, please note that 37 percent of biotech plantings occur outside the U.S. Other countries recognize the benefits of the technology and strive to capture its potential. Even as the European Union set up road blocks to biotechnology trade, its Member countries were spending millions on research and development for that very technology.

Our witnesses aptly point out how certain events such as trade restrictions have caused our domestic usage of biotechnology to ebb and flow at times. However, as I noted earlier, techniques such as no till planting that can prevent soil erosion have to a great degree only recently come into their own with the advent of biotech products. As the world population grows and producers need to feed those extra mouths using environmentally friendly productions techniques with increased yields, biotechnology may be one of our only solutions.

I have also asked our witnesses to discuss current and future products that are in their research pipelines. What is the next big product for agricultural producers or for that matter for consumers? We all know about pesticide resistance but what about foods that produce or contain certain beneficial

nutrients and those that may be used to create products such as ethanol or plastics. Furthermore, what biotechnology role may there be for lesser developed countries whose entire population may thrive on one breakthrough product.

We have heard about the novel possibilities of biotechnology for years and we are so much closer to seeing many of these products reach commercialization than ever before.

Finally, we will hear from researchers and capacity builders. What does it really take to get the research done and to create jobs out in rural America? Producers can use the technology in the fields but how do small communities turn this science into steady and stable employment opportunities?

Much of the projected growth for products of biotechnology has become a reality, and I am quite amazed at how important these products have become to us. I look forward to today's testimony.